

# Studies Show Violent Videos Damage Brain

by Don Phau

Recently released medical studies indicate that violent video games damage the brain, possibly permanently. Video games may be more dangerous to your health than cigarettes or alcohol. This national scandal has been covered up for the benefit of the \$10 billion-a-year video-game industry, of which violent games rated “M,” for Mature, are the fastest-growing segment. Approximately 20 million Americans, many under 18, play these “M” games. The studies, many years in the making, show that repeated playing of violent video games “desensitizes” the activities of the brain involved in reasoning and planning, while activating those functions that respond to violence. The studies include scientific data indicating that these games may actually cause destructive behavior.

These research studies also underline the assessments of Lyndon and Helga LaRouche in this news service, and of specialist Lt. Col. David Grossman, that point-and-shoot video games can and do function as training devices teaching young players how to accurately shoot and kill human targets. For more than three years, *EIR* has featured the warnings by Lyndon LaRouche, Helga Zepp-LaRouche, and Colonel Grossman, that violent “entertainment,” such as video games, was a key factor in shootings and killings at schools around the world, such as those at Columbine High School in Colorado, where 27 students and teachers were massacred by two crazed youths addicted to violent video games and movies.

## Decreased Brain Activity

The lead study was directed by Dr. Vincent Mathews of the University of Indiana, and presented at the 88th Scientific Sessions and Annual Meeting of the Radiological Society of North America in Chicago in December of this year. Dr. Mathews’ team conducted brain scans, called functional MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imaging), of 38 teenagers, ages 13-17. The teens were divided into two groups. One group of 19 had been diagnosed as having behavior problems (Disruptive Mental Disorders), and the other 19 were “normal.” Both groups were given two video games to play. One game was a non-violent car-racing game, and the other was a violent James Bond-type shoot-’em-up. Both groups played the games while having their brains scanned by MRI. According to Dr. Mathews, the MRI scans measured brain activity by increased blood flow in the scanned areas.

The results showed that both groups had decreased brain activity when regularly playing the violent video game. Brain changes were most apparent in those teens who were “heavy

users”—“those who played several hours a day,” said Dr. Mathews. Though he did not issue any blanket condemnation of violent video games, Mathews did say, “I think this information gives credence to what has become a growing concern about what is perceived as increased violence among adolescents.”

Carol Rumack, a doctor of radiology and pediatrics at the University of Colorado, said that the Indiana study suggests that repeated exposure to violent video games is “desensitizing the brain. . . . The result is that the child can no longer understand the real effects of violence.” These conclusions were also confirmed in a discussion with John P. Murray, professor of developmental psychology at Kansas State University. Professor Murray has conducted his own studies of violence using MRI (see interview).

There have been other less elaborate studies which back up Dr. Mathews’ work. A story in the October 2002 issue of *Computer Game* magazine reported that in Japan, Akio Mori, a professor of neurology at Nihon University, said that children are at risk of developing “Video-Game Brain,” a permanent suppression of certain brain functions. He examined 240 people between the ages of 6 and 29. Mori studied brain wave activity over a six-month period. The subjects showed a decline in beta wave activity “associated with emotional functions, planning and self-control. . . . Those who spent 2-7 hours a day playing showed little activity at all.”

## Training Killers

Another experimental test, done at the urging of Colonel Grossman, confirmed that video games serve as training devices which teach children how to kill. In the Summer of 2000 in Indiana, a study was conducted by a parents’ group called the Center for Successful Parenting (CSP), together with a national police group called “Dogs Against Drugs.” The results appeared in a report entitled “Video-Game Violent Skills Study,” by Tom Stoughton. This experiment involved: “forty boys ages 12 to 18, none of whom had ever fired a firearm of any kind. The participants were split into two groups of 20. The control group consisted of the youths who had limited experience with ‘first person shooter’ video games. The experimental group was made up of boys who claimed, in contrast, to being avid players of these games. The boys in the latter category were required to demonstrate their proficiency by actually playing a ‘first person shooter’ video game while being observed by local law enforcement police officers from Madison County, Indiana, who are firearm instructors.”

The report continues: “After two hours of rigorous safety instruction, each group fired two, ten-shot courses of fire with a .9mm automatic pistol at a human silhouette target located at a distance of 15 yards. The first ten shots were not scored, and were intended merely to familiarize the boys with the feel of the weapon. The second ten shots were recorded and compared. The results were astounding. The control group; i.e., those boys with limited exposure to ‘first person shooter’ video games, hit the paper target on an average of 85% of